Views are mixed on proposed coal mines

CEDAR CITY (AP) — Some in southern Utah see plans for new coal mines as a much-needed boost for the region's economy. Others, though, worry about effects on the environment and increased truck traffic.

The Utah Division of Oil, Gas and Mining has given preliminary approval for Cedar City's Alton Coal Development to mine up to 2 million tons of surface coal on 635 acres of private land near the tiny Kane County town of Alton.

Meanwhile, the Bureau of Land Management is reviewing the company's application to the mine 3,500 acres of adjacent public land.

Kane County Commissioner Dan Hulet hopes the operations would help reinvigorate the area's economy and provide royalties so local property taxes can be reduced.

"It would definitely benefit the county by bringing jobs ... that pay a good wage," he said. "It's what we need."

Coal from the private land would be trucked about 130 miles to a facility near Cedar City.

That's where some of the criticism is being targeted, especially in nearby Garfield County, which relies on U.S. Highway 89, a scenic route popular with tourists visiting the area's national parks.

"Having 300 trucks a day driving on a designated scenic byway I believe will harm businesses that exist here," said Grant Olenslager, who owns the Purple Sage Motel in Panguitch. "I've lived in mining towns before and the long-term effects are never worth the short-term gains."

But Janet Oldham, who owns the Flying M restaurant and takes over as mayor in January, said she and many others support the mine.

"I think if you canvassed the town, you'd find more people for it than against it," she said. "A lot of people are looking forward to some economic development."

Environmental groups are seeking to block the mining, saying it would damage water, air and wildlife.

In November, they filed an appeal of the state's preliminary approval. Stephen Bloch, an attorney for the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, said SUWA and The Sierra Club would like to do an on-site inspection of the tract to be mined. That may not be possible until spring because of winter snow.

Bloch said that the permitting process was faulty though state officials dispute that claim.

"The environmentalists don't want to see anything happen anywhere," said Hulet, the county commissioner. "They just want people in communities and across America to rely on social programs like with health care. They don't want to see anyone with a good paying job."

The area on BLM land has been permitted several times but never mined, according to Keith Rigtrup, a district planner for the agency who is overseeing environmental studies of the latest application. An environmental impact statement is expected to be finished in the spring and will be out for public comment.

Even if BLM approves the application, the company would have to submit a mining plan to the state in order to get a permit.

BLM struggles against illegal dumping on federal lands

By Mike Stark
The Associated Press

SKULL VALLEY (AP) — During a warm spell this fall, vandals hauled 18 decrepit televisions and computers down a narrow gravel road in Utah's picturesque Skull Valley, dumped them on a hillside, blasted them with guns and left them for dead.

Nearby on the scrubby valley floor, other items have met the same fate: a hot water heater, paint cans, a candy vending machine, a couch and even a pile of mannequin heads.

Illegally dumped garbage is piling up on federal lands, often creating toxic hazards and costly cleanups. And nowhere is it more apparent than on the vast, often-stunning tracts owned by the Bureau of Land Management, the nation's largest landlord with some

"If there's trash there already, (people) feel like they can dump their own trash," said Beth Barrie, project manager for Take Pride in America in southern Nevada.

BLM officials there say that over the last year, they've cleaned up more than 100 illegal dumps sites outside Las Vegas. Another 100 are scheduled for cleanup and about 35 are perpetual problems that may never be remediated.

Faced with mounting dump sites and expenses, BLM is now preparing a national appeal to the public to halt illegal dumping. A nationwide campaign could launch next year.

It's no sure bet though. In many places, the BLM has put up signs asking the public not to litter. Many end up vandalized, destroyed or shot to pieces.

It's frustrating, said Kelsey, who worked on a recent cleanup

Those tenacious enough to dig through piles of trash for a name or address label sometimes come up with a lead. That's how they caught a New Mexico woman who told authorities she paid a contractor to haul her garbage away and was surprised to learn it ended up on BLM land.

Scofflaws are sometimes caught and fined but it's rare. "I'd say 5 to 10 percent we can trace it back," said Linda McGlothlen at BLM's office in Colorado's Royal Gorge office.

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